ED 417 473   EA 028 935

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TITLE   A Study of Roles and Responsibilities of Assistant Secondary
                School Principals.
PUB DATE   1977-11-00
NOTE   16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South
                Educational Research Association (Memphis, TN, November
                1997).
PUB TYPE   Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Administrators; *Assistant Principals; *Educational
                Administration; Principals; *Responsibility; School
                Administration; *Secondary Education; Sex Differences;
                *Staff Role; *State Surveys
IDENTIFIERS   *Mississippi

ABSTRACT
        The purpose of this study was to examine the actual and
ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals and
to identify characteristics necessary for effective assistant secondary
school principals as measured by the opinions of secondary principals and
assistant secondary principals in Mississippi. Data were gathered from 369
secondary school principals and assistant secondary principals. Results
indicate no significant difference in the opinions of secondary school
principals and assistant secondary school principals regarding the actual
roles and responsibilities of the latter group. Both groups ranked judgment,
ethical behavior, leadership skills, dependability, commitment, credibility,
loyalty, conflict-resolution skills, and active listening skills as the most
important professional, personal, and psychosocial characteristics necessary
for effective assistant secondary school principals. However, the majority of
principals and assistant principals who responded were white males, and when
rankings were analyzed by position and gender, female principals placed
written communication as their fourth highest ranked characteristic and
judgment, tied with five other characteristics for the seventh-ranked
characteristic. No significant relationship between the two groups regarding
their opinions of either actual or ideal roles and responsibilities of
assistant secondary school principals emerged. Recommendations for further
study are offered. (Contains 51 references.) (RJM)

A Study of Roles and Responsibilities of Assistant Secondary School Principals

by

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Paper presented
at the
Annual Meeting
of the
Mid-South American Educational Research Association
November 13, 1997
Memphis, Tennessee

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the actual and ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals and to identify characteristics necessary for effective assistant secondary school principals as measured by the opinions of secondary principals and assistant secondary principals in Mississippi. The opinions of principals and assistant principals were compared in general and by specific demographic characteristics of gender, age, number of students enrolled where respondents were employed, number of years of in current position, and income of the respondents. This study was carried out through analysis of data obtained by the dissemination and collection of a research instrument, Assistant Secondary School Principals (ASSP) Opinionnaire. It was distributed to a total of 516 secondary school principals and assistant secondary principals in the state of Mississippi. This population represented all of the identified secondary principals and assistant secondary principals, exclusive of those who participated as validators and those who were a part of the pilot for this study. Three hundred sixty (369) of those surveyed responded, 171 secondary principals and 198 assistant secondary school principals.

The opinionnaire was used to gather data regarding the opinion of secondary principals and assistants about the importance of roles and responsibilities based on how they viewed the day-to-day functioning of assistant principals and how they would ideally like to see assistant principals function. The opinionnaire also ascertained information about the importance of professional, personal, and psycho-social characteristics necessary for effective assistant secondary school principals as ranked by the opinions of those responding.

There were no significant differences found in the opinions of secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals regarding the actual roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals. They generally agreed that they were important. These opinions were not significantly different when comparing the responses based on the number of students enrolled where respondents were employed, number of years in present position, age, income, or gender of the respondents.

There were no significant differences found in the opinions of principals and assistant principals regarding the ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals. On a Likert scale of very unimportant to very important, they viewed these roles from important to very important. These opinions were not significantly different when comparing the responses based on the number of students enrolled where respondents were employed, years in present position, age, income, or gender of respondents.

Principals and assistant principals ranked judgment, ethical behaviors, leadership skills, dependability, commitment, credibility, loyalty, conflict resolution skills, and active listening skills as the most important professional, personal, and psycho-social characteristics necessary for effective assistant secondary school principals. However, when these rankings were analyzed by position and gender, female principals ranked written communication as their fourth highest ranked characteristic and judgment tied with five other characteristics for the seventh ranked characteristic.

There was no significant relationship between secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi regarding their opinions of actual roles and responsibilities of the assistant secondary school principal. There was no significant

relationship between secondary principals and assistant secondary principals regarding their opinions of ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals. These opinions were not significantly different when comparing them by gender. All of the null hypotheses were accepted. The alpha level of probability was selected at the .05 level of statistical significance.

Introduction

What are the roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals? Who determines these roles and responsibilities? Are these roles and responsibilities clearly defined or are they ambiguous? How do principals ideally view these roles and responsibilities? How do assistant principals ideally view these roles and responsibilities? Are these ideal roles and responsibilities perceived by principals actually happening in schools? Are these roles perceived ideally by assistant principals actually occurring daily in schools? What are characteristics that are necessary for assistant principals to function effectively? These are some questions being asked by practitioners, by those designing and implementing training programs, and by those interested in entering the field of educational administration.

As schools attempt to serve more diverse student populations, there is a need to examine the functioning of those employed to manage this process. Public schools face the challenge of preparing students to function productively in today's and tomorrow's society. School management teams must demonstrate a commitment to produce quality schools with quality programs (Williams, 1995). The assistant principal will assume an increasingly important role in the functioning of the school principalship. The assistant principal as a person and the assistant principalship as a role are integral parts of the principalship. The assistant principal shares an important role in developing and sustaining an effective leadership team (Pellicer, Anderson, Keefe, Kelley, & McCleary, 1988). Therefore, a critical look at the roles and responsibilities of the assistant secondary school principalship is necessary.

Much of the effective schools literature has been focused on the principalship as vital for successful school reform. The literature has given less attention to the role of the assistant principal (Glanz, 1994). Hassenpflug (1991) contended that the position of the assistant principal should be redefined, that it should be more intellectually challenging, and that instructional leadership should be more a part of the responsibility of the assistant principal. However, any redefining must first claim the attention of those serving in the position and those responsible for supervising the assistant school principal. They must assert themselves to be a part of this dialogue and help to move beyond past performances to new horizons.

There have been many studies examining the characteristics of the effective principal. However, little comment has been given to the characteristics needed for the effective assistant principal. Current perspectives on characteristics needed for the effective assistant principal should be of great value as we examine the training and retraining of effective school leaders. This information may prove valuable as we chart the future for school leadership positions, preparation, and effectiveness.

Relatively little research has been completed during the past decades that has focused on the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal and none has been reported in the state

of Mississippi that focused on the actual and ideal roles and responsibilities regarding this position. This study addressed these issues and can serve as a springboard for action and other research as ways are examined to improve school leadership and enhance student performance.

Statement of the Problem

The problem under investigation was to examine the actual and ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary principals and identify characteristics necessary for effective assistant secondary school principals as measured by the opinions of secondary principals and assistant secondary school principals.

Purpose of the Study

This purpose of this study was to examine the actual and ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals and to identify characteristics necessary for assistant secondary school principals as measured by the opinions of secondary principals and assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi. These opinions were obtained by administering the Assistant Secondary School Principals (ASSP) Opinionnaire. These opinions were compared in general and by gender, number of students enrolled where respondents were employed, number of years in current position, and income of the respondents.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant for several reasons. First, while it appears that the role of the assistant principal has transformed since the 1920's, when the primary responsibilities included clerical duties and supervision of cocurriculum activities (Marshall, 1992), there may still be a large part of each day of the assistant principal spent performing various caretaker tasks (Koru, 1993). Instead of being a viable partner in the administrative team, the assistant principal may still be performing duties that are primarily clerical in nature, in charge of discipline, supervising bus and cafeteria operations, and managing custodial duties. It is important to obtain the opinions of assistant principals about their actual roles and responsibilities as they function daily. It is equally as important to obtain the opinions of how they would ideally like to see the assistant principalship function. This will help provide a realistic analysis that may be of value to persons desirous of entering the field of school administration as an assistant principal.

A second reason that illustrated the significance of this study is that the principal is the key to making team management work at the building level. The principal must be a confident leader willing to share the instructional role and be comfortable with shared decision making (Williams, 1995). The principal has the authority and power to set a limit on the amount of time the assistant principal spends "doing" and increase the amount of time engaged in education leadership. The principal can set expectations for the adjustment of the assistant principal's work style to decrease crisis management activities and place higher priority on planning, organizing, and facilitating. The principal can observe, document,

discuss, and reinforce desired behaviors of the assistant principal (Rodrick, 1986). The findings from this study can help principals recognize a need for reconciliation of actual and ideal roles and responsibilities or serve as a reaffirmation, depending on the results.

While the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal continue to change, according to some; there are others who support the notion that there has been very little change in the assistant principal's roles over the past decades. The roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal vary among schools and within school districts. The principal is considered the entity that has a great impact on the fortunes of the assistant principal. The assistant principal is expected to follow the directives of the principal (Gorton, 1987; Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). Because the principal is a key player in the helping to determine the actual roles and responsibilities the assistant principal will assume, it is important to examine the principal's opinions regarding the actual and ideal roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal.

A final reason that illustrated the significance of this study is that as the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal are examined, attention must be focused on helping to identify characteristics that enhance effectiveness. According to Calabrese (1991), effective schools tend to have assistant principals who are dynamic, enthusiastic, creative and caring. However, there appears to be little research that has identified those characteristics necessary to help produce this desired effectiveness. The information obtained through this study may be used in designing relevant training for the assistant principal. It may also be useful for those directly responsible for supervising the assistant principal and giving directives for supervision to provide appropriate guidance to embellish the identified important characteristics. The reasons identified may significantly contribute to the knowledge base used in daily practices that influence school operations, enhance effectiveness, and improve student performance.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed for this study:

1. Are there differences in the actual roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals in the opinions of secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi?

2. Are there differences in the ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals in the opinions of secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi?

3. Are there differences in the actual roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals in the opinions of secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi relative to the number of students enrolled where respondent is employed, number of years in current position, age, income, or gender of respondent?

4. Are there any differences in the ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals in the opinions of secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi relative to the number of students enrolled

where respondent is employed, number of years in current position, age, income, or gender of respondent?

5. What professional, personal, and psycho-social characteristics are identified as most important for effective assistant secondary school principals in the opinions of secondary school principals in Mississippi?

6. What professional, personal, and psycho-social characteristics are identified as most important for effective assistant secondary school principals in the opinions of assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi?

7. Are there differences in the opinions of female and male secondary school principals in Mississippi regarding the most important professional, personal, and psycho-social characteristics necessary for effective assistant secondary school principals?

8. Are there differences in the opinions of female and male assistant secondary principals in Mississippi regarding the most important professional, personal, and psycho-social characteristics necessary for effective assistant secondary school principals?

Hypotheses Tested

This study tested the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi regarding their opinions of actual roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals.

2. There is no significant relationship between secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi regarding their opinions of ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals.

3. There is no significant relationship between male secondary school principals and male assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi regarding their opinions of actual roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals.

4. There is no significant relationship between female secondary school principals and female assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi regarding their opinions of actual roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals.

5. There is no significant relationship between male secondary school principals and male assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi regarding their opinions of ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals.

6. There is no significant relationship between female secondary school principals and female assistant secondary principals in Mississippi regarding their opinions of ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals.

Research Design

The research design employed in this study was descriptive in nature. It was carried out through the dissemination, collection, and analysis of an opinionnaire administered to secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals in the state of Mississippi.

Population

The population for this study included all secondary school principals and assistant principals in Mississippi. This population was identified through the Mississippi Information Services (MIS) of the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). The administrators were those practicing in schools that contained grades nine through twelve or any combinations with secondary grades therein. Twenty-five of these principals and assistant principals were randomly selected to be a part of the pilot study. Participants in the validators' panel and the pilot study were excluded from the final study. Therefore, the population was 516. These principals (268) and assistant principals (248) were sent a cover letter requesting their participation and an opinionnaire. A follow-up letter was mailed to help ensure maximum response.

Instrumentation

The items selected to be used in this opinionnaire, Assistant Secondary School Principals (ASSP) Opinionnaire, were based on a review of the literature, experience of the researcher, and professional knowledge of the researcher. The opinionnaire contained the following components: Section I: Demographics, Section II: Roles and Responsibilities and, Section III: Characteristics. Section I allowed data to be gathered regarding the position of the respondent, gender, race/ethnic origin, number of years in current position, certification in educational administration and supervision, annual gross income, age, number of students enrolled at the school where respondent was employed, lowest grade in school where respondent was employed, and highest grade in school where respondent was employed. Sections II contained 30 Likert-type items to obtain the opinions of principals and assistant principals of the actual and ideal roles and responsibilities of the assistant secondary school principal. Section III contained 30 characteristics that were categorized in three areas: personal, professional, and psycho-social. Participants were asked to identify the importance of these characteristics for the effective assistant principal by choosing "Very Unimportant," "Unimportant," "Important," or "Very Important."

Validity

The opinionnaire was analyzed for validity. A panel of validators reviewed the instrument for content validity. The panelist met the following criteria: (a) possessed at least a master's degree in educational administration and supervision or AA certification; (b) was a practicing school administrator, or not more than two years had passed since last practiced, or a current staff member of a university personnel preparation program in the area of educational administration and supervision; and (c) possessed at least three years of experience as a school administrator. The minimum validators' response level was set at 60%. The item had to receive at least a 60 percent agreement among validators for the item to be included in the instrument.

Reliability

The reliability was established through a pilot administration of the initial draft of the Assistant Secondary School Principals (ASSP) Opinionnaire. Twenty-five secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals from school districts in Mississippi were asked to respond to the opinionnaire. Internal consistency and reliability were determined and a reliability coefficient computed for the entire survey using the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha. A reliability of at least 0.85 on all sections was sought. The results of the pilot yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.96.

Statistical Procedures

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data for this study. The demographics used described the population of the study with respect to the number of principals and assistant principals who responded, their gender, race/ethnic origin, number of years in current position, certification level, income, age, and student enrollment data. The Chi-square test of independence was used to determine the relationship between the responses of participants with respect to position and gender at the .05 level of significance.

Summary

The ASSP Opinionnaire was designed; piloted; revised, based on data obtained from the pilot and from the validators; and disseminated to 516 secondary principals and assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi. Three hundred sixty nine (369) responded. This represented 171 principals and 198 assistant principals. A further look at the demographics revealed that 133 were African Americans and 235 were White; 72 were females and 297 were males. The majority (58.8%) had been in their current position 1-5 years, most (57.9%) were between 46-60 years of age, and most (57.4%) earned an annual gross salary between $40,000 and 49,999. Those responding reported that most (80.5%) possessed AA in educational administration. The respondents indicated that 46.2% worked in schools with student enrollment of 501-1,000.

The opinions of secondary principals and assistant secondary school principals did not greatly differ regarding their opinions of actual and ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals. They generally saw the actual roles and responsibilities as important. They generally viewed the ideal roles and responsibilities as important to very important. These opinions were not significantly different when comparing their responses based on the number of students enrolled in the school where respondents were employed, years in present position, age, income or gender of the respondents.

The characteristics identified by principals and assistant principals that are necessary for effective assistant secondary principals did not differ greatly. They selected the following professional characteristics by rankings: judgment, ethical behaviors,

leadership skills, and educational values. Dependability, commitment, credibility, and emotional control were identified as the top ranked personal characteristics necessary for effective assistant school principals. The top ranked psycho-social characteristics selected were conflict resolution skills, loyalty, active listening skills, and stress tolerance. Consensus/team decision making was the professional characteristic that was the least ranked. Physical strength was ranked as the least important personal characteristic and competitiveness the least important psycho-social characteristic necessary for effective assistant secondary school principals.

The six null hypotheses tested were accepted. They were tested at the .05 level of significance. There was no significant relationship between secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principal regarding their opinions of actual roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals. There was no significant relationship between secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals in Mississippi regarding their opinions of ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals. There was no significant relationship between secondary male principals and assistant secondary male principals regarding their opinions of actual and ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals. There was no significant relationship between secondary female principals and assistant secondary female principals regarding their opinions of actual and ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on the results of the analyses of data and reported findings of the study.

1. The total population for the final study was 516, 248 assistant principals and 268 principals. A total of 369 (72%) participants responded, 198 assistant principals (80%) and 171 (64%) principals. These figures represented 133 African-Americans and 235 White respondents; 72 were females and 297 were males. The majority had been in their current position 1-5 years, most were between 46-60 years of age, and most earned an annual gross salary between $40,000 and 49,999. Those responding reported that most possessed AA certification in educational administration. The respondents indicated that the greater percentage worked in schools with student enrollment of 501-1,000.

2. Secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals expressed similar opinions regarding the actual roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals. They generally agreed that these actual roles and responsibilities were important. They expressed that these actual roles and responsibilities were important regardless of the number of students enrolled in the school, years in present position, age, income, or gender of respondents.

3. Secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals expressed similar opinions regarding the ideal roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals. They viewed these ideal roles and responsibilities as important to very

important, regardless of the number of students enrolled in the school, years in present position, age, income, or gender of respondents.

4. The most important professional characteristics ranked by secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals necessary for effective assistant principals were judgment, ethical behaviors, leadership skills, and educational values. Knowledge of school was the next most important characteristic selected by principals and problem analysis was the most important selected by assistant principals.

5. The most important personal characteristics ranked by secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals necessary for effective assistant principals were dependability, commitment, credibility, and emotional control. Patience was the next most important characteristic ranked by principals and self confidence was the next most important ranked by assistant principals.

6. The most important psycho-social characteristics ranked by secondary school principals and assistant secondary school principals for effective assistant secondary school principals were loyalty, conflict resolution, active listening skills, and tolerance of stress. Principals ranked facilitation skills as the next most important characteristic but the next most important characteristic ranked by assistant principals was sensitivity.

7. The personal and psycho-social characteristics ranked as least important for effective assistant secondary school principals as identified by the opinions of secondary principals and assistant secondary school principals were physical strength and competitiveness, respectively. Consensus/team decision making was the least important of the professional characteristics.

8. The most important characteristics for effective assistant secondary principals identified by male principals were consistent with those expressed overall by principals. However, for female principals, written communication emerged as one of the first ranked professional characteristics. The views of male principals on the personal characteristics were also consistent with principals in general. However, female principals choose self confidence and decisiveness as two of their top ranked, as opposed to emotional control and patience chosen by male principals.

9. Male assistant secondary school principals ranked characteristics consistent with assistant secondary school principals in general regarding the most important professional characteristics. However, female assistant secondary school principals choose oral communication as one of the top characteristics, as opposed to ethical behaviors chosen by male assistant secondary school principals. Male assistant principals' first four personal characteristics were consistent with the overall listing by assistant principals. However, they ranked patience as their fifth choice. Female assistants were consistent with the first three characteristics, then they ranked perseverance and flexibility as their next choices. Female assistant principals' list of psycho-social skills were identical with the ranking of the overall assistant principal's ranking. However, male assistants ranked facilitation skills as their fifth top characteristic as opposed to sensitivity.

Recommendations for Further Study

The following recommendations are based on the results of this study and previous research:

1. Further study is needed to compare and contrast the actual and ideal roles of the assistant principal. Results from this study indicated that principals and assistant principals generally increased the direction of their responses regarding ideal roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal to reflect very important. Therefore, more research in this area may provide data that can be used to help reconcile actual and ideal and may also lend itself to issues about job satisfaction, quality management, and training.

2. There is a need to examine the roles and responsibilities of assistant secondary school principals to include the opinions of teachers, parents, students, superintendents, the community, and school boards. The literature revealed that if the position of the assistant principal is to be reformed, a more in-depth analysis is needed. An analysis should include the above mentioned key players in today's schools.

3. Future studies should be conducted to compare the characteristics needed for the assistant principals with those characteristics needed for the principalship. If today's assistant principals are to be considered for the principalship, they must be adequately prepared. There is the need to examine the characteristics, training, and functioning of the assistant principal and the principalship co-existing, not in isolation. If the assistant principalship is to effectively serve as one aspect of that training, then there is a need to closely examine the professional, personal, and psycho-social characteristics necessary for the principalship.

4. There is the continued need to examine the training programs currently in place and future programs to come for the assistant principal. The literature pointed to the fact that often the assistant principalship is the first administrative rung up the career ladder for school leaders. There is a need to identify the content of such training to determine if it is effectively meeting the needs of those for whom it was intended.

5. Further study is needed to help provide principals with effective strategies to better manage all of the required school responsibilities, including the nurturing of the assistant principal. As principals are required to be more accountable to parents, students, staff, governing boards, and the public; there is the chance that the mentoring and nurturing needed for the effective assistant principal might not evolve, unless principals receive additional assistance and full support.

6. Additional studies are needed to help provide assistant principals with techniques to be self advocates, risk takers, promoters, visionary facilitators, an integral part of the management team, and leaders for today's and tomorrow's schools. If the assistant principalship is to be a truly viable, functioning, effective position; then those in the position must actively participate in helping to set the directions.

7. The findings in this study identified that the majority of the principals and assistant principals who responded were White males. Further study is continually needed to compare the demographics of schools with the demographics of the school

leadership. The literature review alluded to the fact that the assistant principalship does not successfully serve as a steppingstone to the principalship for females and minorities. There is a need to examine what our schools will look like in the future and devise strategies to be sure that our school leadership reflects the same.

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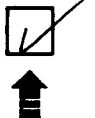
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